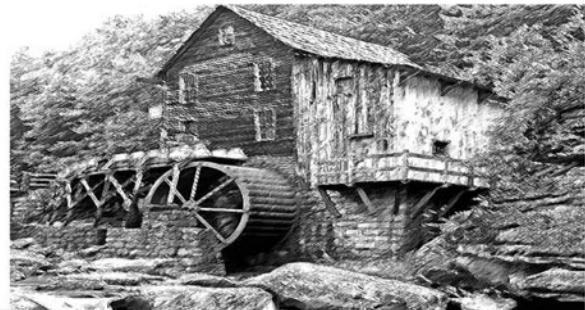


# The Gristmill

## Saratoga County History Journal



Preserving the History of Saratoga County

Summer 2022

## Elsa Von Blumen – The Girl Who Raced Horses

By Dave Waite

The forty-fourth annual Saratoga County Fair was held at the Ballston Spa Fairgrounds at the beginning of September of 1885. Enthusiastic crowds were entertained with displays of local produce and livestock as well as horse racing and other activities. One of these events was a race pitting bicycle riding Elsa Von Blumen against a horse and sulky. The thousands who lined the track that day were likely not aware that earlier in life this young woman had been fighting each day to ward off a much greater foe.

Elsa Von Blumen had been born Carrie Kiner on Oct. 6, 1859, the daughter of Prussia natives George Kiner and his wife Ann. After serving in the Civil War, George brought his family to Oswego County, New York where he found work as a laborer. Soon after coming to central New York, Carrie began to exhibit symptoms that the family doctor diagnosed as the early stages of consumption, a disease we now know as tuberculosis. At that time there was no effective treatment for this serious infectious bacterial disease that mainly attacks a person's lungs. Not willing to give in to the disease, Carrie rejected the common treatment of bed rest and established a routine of exercise that both brought healing and guided her life well into adulthood.

Taking advantage of the remarkable endurance she had developed during her years of recovery, in 1879, Carrie took the name Elsa von Blumen, hired a manager, and started a career as a competitive walker. To bring her skills before the public, she competed against men in indoor races where she would walk 100 miles to their 120 miles over twenty-seven hours. One of these events was held in March of that year at Martin Hall in Albany, New York. Though no winner was ever reported, in the afternoon of



Elsa Von Blumen races a horse.

*Source: Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspapers*

the 2nd day of racing Elsa had walked 71 miles to her competitors 72, both still covering a mile in just over 13 minutes.

Seeking new opportunities to showcase her abilities, in 1881, she turned to bicycle racing. The machine she rode was the high wheel style with a large front wheel that came to be known as a Penny Farthing. The first test of her skill awheel pitted her against a horse and sulky at Driving Park in Rochester, New York. To keep the competition fair, the horse, named 'Hattie R' was started a quarter-mile behind Elsa and would race one mile to her three quarters. When all the heats had been completed, Von Blumen had taken two out of three, winning the contest.

Later that summer she competed again, this time at the Union Agricultural Grounds in Brockport, New York, twenty miles west of Rochester. Elsa was put against a trotter named 'Gray Eagle' who again would run one mile to her three quarters for this race. Miss Von Blumen on her high wheeler took two straight heats, peddling the distance in 3:13 and 3:15. By 1882 she was considered the American women's cycling champion, a title she only held until July of that year when she was beaten in

Continued on next page

# Elsa Von Blumen

Continued from previous page

Philadelphia by Louise Armaindo.

Elsa Von Blumen saw herself not only as a competitor but also as a role model, as she explained in an interview published in the November 11, 1881 issue of Bicycling World Magazine:

"I feel I am not only offering the most novel and fascinating entertainment now before the people but am demonstrating the great need on the part of American young ladies, especially, of physical culture and bodily exercise. Success in life depends as much upon a vigorous and healthy body as upon a clear and active mind."

In Mid-April of 1882, Elsa competed in a thousand-mile race held in Detroit, Michigan. Her efforts fell short as she was only able to complete 850 miles. A few days later the reason for her failure came to light, she had contracted Smallpox. To prevent the disease from further spreading, she was placed in a local pest house under the care of a physician. Along with a clean bill of health and her release from confinement, she was also sued by the pest house doctor for his services, and her bicycle seized for payment. The lawsuit alleged that this physician believed Elsa had agreed to marry him and had gone back on her word. According to the newspaper, she responded that she looked upon the whole thing as extremely foolish. As with many stories, there are often two sides, and from a Wheeling, West Virginia newspaper, it was revealed another scenario; that Von Blumen's treasurer had run off with her money, and her bicycle had been attached simply to cover the doctor bill.

Her difficulties must not have jaded her towards marriage, as in 1883, only a year after the incident in Detroit, she tied the knot with Emory Beardsley in her hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. A few weeks after they had wed Elsa and Emory went off for a day together visiting neighbors. All seemed to be going well until Elsa's hus-

band suddenly left, giving no explanation other than his intention to come back for her sometime later. After several days, she finally gave up hope of his returning and made her way home on her own. On her return, she encountered a scene that no newlywed would be prepared for. The house was stripped bare of her possessions, and her husband was nowhere to be found. Left with no other recourse, she obtained a search warrant against her in-laws and her belongings

were found hidden under a haystack on their property. Elsa returned to her family, now living in Rochester, with divorce following a short time later.

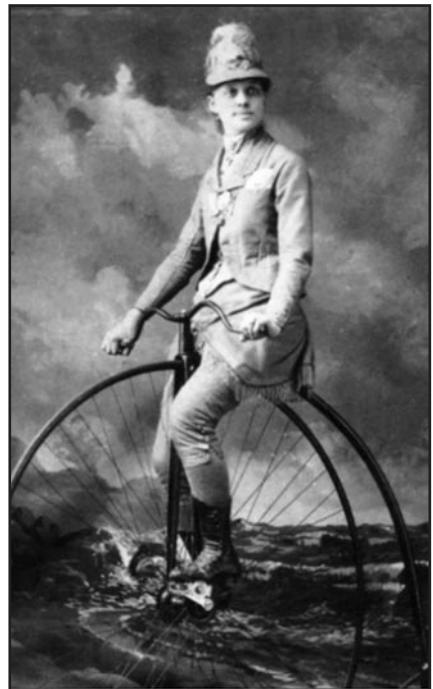
Elsa Von Blumen quickly moved past her failed marriage and continued to compete on bicycle against other opponents: men, women, and equine across the eastern half of the country for the next two years, her path bringing her to the Saratoga County Fair in the late summer of 1885.

On Friday, September 4th, Elsa was scheduled to race against a trotter at the fair, the first of the two consecutive days she would race. As usual, her challenger would travel one mile to her three-quarters of a mile, with the best two out of three races to determine the winner. The first day was not a good one for Elsa, as she was thrown from her bicycle and badly shaken up before completing the three races. Fortunately, after a day of rest, she came back and beat the trotter two out of three times. In a seemingly strange move by the fair management, and after a week of negotiations, Elsa was paid for her races, receiving only \$125 of the \$200 that she had been originally offered.

Elsa would continue to compete in bicycle racing for several years and would marry twice more, the first of these in 1892 to her manager Burt Miller, whose real name was William H. Roosevelt, and after his death to his brother Isaac. Caroline Wilhelmina Kiner Roosevelt passed away at her home in Rochester in 1935 at the age of seventy-five.

The banner illustration was created from a sketch of her race in Rochester from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, the photograph of Elsa on the high wheeler is from m-bike.org.

*Sources for this article are the online newspaper archives at fultonsearch.org, nyshistoricnewspapers.org, and chroniclingamerica.loc.gov.*



**Elsa Von Blumen**



Preserving the History of Saratoga County

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# All Eyes on the Turning Point!

By Lauren Roberts, Saratoga County Historian

Many people can still remember when America celebrated the bicentennial of its founding nearly fifty years ago. In 1976, the celebration of our independence from Britain inspired many citizens to look back through history and learn more about what it means to be American. Not only were parades, parties and events held, but books were published, historical societies created, and general interest in local history hit a high point. Those of us in the historical field today still benefit from the work done by historians and interested citizens during the bicentennial, such as collecting oral histories, supporting historic preservation and erecting historical markers to make the general public aware that history happened here.

In just a few short years, the 250th (or Semiquincentennial) Anniversary of the American Revolution will be on the doorstep and we will once again have the opportunity to shine a spotlight on the incredible history of Saratoga County and to learn more about the events that took place in our backyard that changed the course of the American Revolution. The Saratoga County Board of Supervisors has created the Saratoga 250th Commission, whose mission is to plan events commemorating this important anniversary. The commission includes representatives from the history community, veterans groups and living history organizations who are all dedicated to making these commemorations meaningful through reaching our goals of engaging a diverse au-

dience and increasing heritage tourism. The group has been meeting since the beginning of the year and plans are underway for some very exciting events. The Saratoga County 250th Commission will have a presence at the Saratoga County Fair this summer where we hope to get the word out about our mission and the importance of the American victory here in the fall of 1777. We hope to see you there!

In anticipation of the upcoming anniversary, the editorial board of *The Gristmill* would like to encourage contributors to consider submitting articles related to the Revolutionary War Era (1760s – 1780s). In addition to encouraging research surrounding the battles themselves, we hope to expand the narrative and bring to light stories that have yet to be told. Men were not the only ones whose lives were upended during wartime; both women and children also experienced great upheaval, both in everyday life and in facing destruction and chaos in and around their homes and communities. Articles including research based on the roles Native Americans, African Americans and Loyalists played in the war are also of particular interest. Stories may have been passed down through families of those who participated in the epic celebrations that took place during the 100th and 150th Anniversaries of the Revolution as well. Do you have an object from the Revolutionary Era whose story you would like to tell? The *Gristmill* Editors welcome any submission which explores the history of our area in the time surrounding the American Revolution.

## Major Daniel McAlpin – a Malta Tory

By Richard Dorrough

*This article originally appeared in the Ballston Journal on September 27, 1997*

After serving 40 years in the service of the British Army, Major Daniel McAlpin decided to make America his home. In May of 1774, he purchased on the west side of Saratoga Lake in the Town of Malta, between 900 and 1,000 acres of land and proceeded immediately to improve it. His first house, he built in 1775 and managed to cultivate 50 to 60 acres. His second house, he built in 1776 and made it his primary residence. Both houses were timber log planked and floored. Major McAlpin had 20 to 25 servants in constant employ upon his farm. By the summer of 1777, he had at least 170 acres in high cultivation. A value of £1 sterling per acre unimproved and £2.10 sterling improved was placed on his property. The houses were valued at £100 and £200 respectively. His livestock was valued at £250 sterling and his farming utensils due to the great many people employed no

less than £125 sterling. He also owned 6,000 acres on the White River in the State of Vermont. It is unknown who McAlpin purchased his property from but it is stated that Palmer acted as the seller's agent. One could speculate that this was Beriah Palmer, who at the time acted as agent for many sellers. The name Clark has been mentioned and two men, Thomas Berry and Jousha Bloore, claimed to hold mortgage against the property dated July, 1775.

Major McAlpin and his wife Mary, had three children, one son and two daughters: James Murray, Isabella and Mary.

Major McAlpin was a staunch loyalist who was soon to find himself persecuted by what he considered to be a pack of rebels. In May of 1776, McAlpin was brought before the Albany Committee of Correspondence to answer charges of his allegiance to the King. It was ordered at this time that he be placed under house arrest and a guard

Continued on next page

# Malta Tory

Continued from previous page

placed at his door. In June of 1776, he was taken from his home and placed under guard at the Fort in Albany. It should be noted at this time that McAlpin was in the company of Lt. Thomas Sword who also suffered the same treatment as he. July of 1776 saw McAlpin paroled as long as he did not leave the City of Albany. It was also decided in July of 1776 to remove McAlpin from the Tory Goal (jail) in Albany and send him and other prisoners to prison in the State of Connecticut. Mary McAlpin was frantic for the safety of her husband and appeared before the committee on August 1, 1776 to appeal for his release on parole. She was denied. On August 2, 1776, the board reversed itself and decided to parole McAlpin at the convenience of and restrictions of General Schuyler. On August 24, 1776, the general decided that due to his advanced age, McAlpin could be of little or no harm and he paroled him to his home. And so, for a while, McAlpin still refusing to swear an oath of loyalty to the rebel cause, got to go home.

McAlpin was arrested twice more. After his second arrest, he decided to escape. Upon hearing word of his pending arrest, McAlpin fled to the woods in February, 1777 and waited to join up with a party of loyalists and flee to Canada to join Burgoyne. McAlpin managed to join with 41 other loyalists and the run for Canada was underway. Since McAlpin was so closely guarded, the local militia was immediately roused and a large body pursued the loyalists north. All were captured except the Major, who managed to escape by secreting himself in the hollow of a tree. It was here that he remained for a week during an Adirondack February. After this time, McAlpin was taken by local loyalists to a place of concealment. He remained there until Burgoyne had reached Fort Edward and it was there that he joined him.

McAlpin was given command of a unit of the Kings Loyal Americans recruited and organized in 1777 by Ebenezer Jessup. The Loyal Americans participated in the Battle of Saratoga. Records of the British Army at Saratoga show McAlpin's Rangers attached to one of the British Regiments.

Mary McAlpin who remained at home in Malta was soon to suffer the fate of many loyalist families. On the 9th of April, 1777, the Committee at Albany was informed that "McAlpin and Thomas Sword, ringleaders in a dangerous conspiracy in this state, had made their escape." On April 17, 1777, a reward was offered by the committee of 100 dollars for the capture of McAlpin. The committee on the 9th of May, 1777, ordered that the family of Daniel McAlpin be immediately removed and the commissioners appointed by the state for the purpose of securing Tory effects, seize all their lands and belongings.

According to Mary McAlpin, from the day her hus-

band left to the day she was forced from her home, the Majors house was never without a party of the rebels present. They lived at their discretions and sometimes in very large numbers. They destroyed what they could not consume. Shortly after the capture of the fleeing loyalists, a group of armed rebels with blackened faces, broke into the McAlpin's dwelling house. They threatened Mary and her children with violence and instant death and confined them to the kitchen while they stripped every valuable article from the home. A few days after this, the Order of the Albany Committee arrived and the remainder of Major McAlpin's belongings were seized. Mrs. McAlpin and her children were taken prisoner and removed by wagon under armed guard to the Village of Stillwater, where they were kept prisoner under arduous conditions for a week. They were then removed to Albany where they had to depend on friends to feed and cloth them.

After the Battle of Saratoga, McAlpin and many of the loyalists refused to surrender to General Gates. They succeeded in escaping to Canada and continued in the service to the Crown. McAlpin continued to command the loyalists he had brought to the side of the Crown while in Malta and had escaped being taken. The long and severe rigors of his adventures had taken their toll and McAlpin's health failed. His health was so impaired and his constitution so broken, that he never recovered. After languishing for five months, the Major died.

*Resources for this article were the minutes of the Albany Committee of Correspondence and the Commissioners of Forfeiture records housed in the New York State Archives and The Haldimand papers in the Canadian Archives.*

## Town of Milton Historian retires

Karen Staulters, recently retired Town of Milton historian, has been awarded the Ministry of Memory Award by the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church. Active as an Archivists for the Troy Conference since 2000, Karen became the Conference Archivist for Upper New York when the Troy Conference merged with other conferences in 2017.

## Factoid

The first State Superintendent of Common Schools in New York State was Gideon Hawley who was raised on a farm in Charlton. Considered "too infirm in health for farming", he was sent to the Ballston Academy and then to Union College where he graduated in 1809. He served as Superintendent from 1812 until 1821 but was ousted by DeWitt Clinton and Martin Van Buren. Being held in high esteem, he was appointed to the Board of Regents in 1814 and continued to serve until 1870. Hawley can truly be called the Father of Public Education in New York State. '

# Henry Laskau, Olympic Speed Walker



Source: *The Saratogian*, August 2, 1949

By John R. Greenwood

I was going through one of my grandfather Elmer Greenwood's scrapbooks recently when I discovered an interesting photograph from the August 2nd, 1949 edition of *The Saratogian*. It pictured six well-dressed men surrounding what appeared to be a long distance runner. I recognized my grandfather on the far left and Bob Walton Sr. (Walton's Sport Shop) in the back. The group appeared to be congratulating the man in the running shorts. I soon found out he was Olympic speed walker Helmut "Henry" Laskau. He'd just won a 38-mile speed walking marathon from Warrensburg to Saratoga Springs. He accomplished the feat in an incredible 5 hours, 58 minutes and 1 second. The photo was taken in front of the Grand Union Hotel on Broadway in Saratoga Springs. A fultonhistory.com search revealed an August 1, 1949 article detailing the event.

The article stated that my grandfather Elmer Greenwood, Robert Walton, W. Ernst Spencer, and the photographer Joseph P. Duval all of Saratoga were judges at the finish line. Denis Mansfield the man seen shaking Laskau's hand was the President of the Saratoga Springs Chamber of Commerce. George H. Maines was director of activities for the Adirondack Chamber of Commerce, who promoted and sponsored the race, and also served as chief judge of the event. Greenwood, Walton, Duval, and Spencer all had an affiliation with the Saratoga Winter Club and the Amateur Athletic Union.

For those not familiar with the sport, speed walking or race walking has been an Olympic event since 1904. In speed walking, one foot must be touching the ground at all times. The 50km race was last run in Tokyo 2021 and has been eliminated from the 2024 Paris Olympics.

A Google search revealed an eye-opening history of Henry Laskau. Born in Germany September 12, 1916, Henry became one of his country's top runners, but be-

cause of his Jewish heritage he was repeatedly passed over for international competition. In 1938 he was sent to a German labor camp. With the help of a sympathetic guard, Henry escaped to France. He eventually found his way to the U.S. and became naturalized in 1943. He joined the Army and became an interpreter in Europe. Laskau later learned that most of his family had died in Hitler's concentration camps.

Henry had been a distance runner when he was young but was encouraged to try race walking after the war. Laskau became one of America's premier race walkers. He represented the US in three Olympic Games (1948-56) and won the 10km walk in the 1951 Pan American Games.

Laskau was haunted by a disqualification in the London Olympic Games in 1948. In 1984, he received a letter from an international statistician who'd researched the race and discovered that Henry had finished seventh and was never actually disqualified. The new information provided some vindication after 36 years.

In his advanced years Henry continued to enjoy long walks near his home in Coconut Creek, Florida. Acquaintances stated that his pace far surpassed younger peers right until the end. He died of Alzheimer's in 2000 at the age of 83.

The discovery and research of this seventy-three year old article is one more example of the simple stories that exist right beneath our noses. That scrapbook has been in my home for almost twenty years and I never looked close enough to appreciate the significance of that one random photograph. The point of sharing it here is two-fold. One is to pass on an interesting piece of local history. The other is to encourage others to take a close look at your own family's history, you might just uncover some Olympic Gold.

# The Bridge My Grandpa Built

*The following article is republished from the Winter 2021/2022 issue of the Hadley-Lake Luzerne Historical Society Newsletter.*

**By Gary Askins**

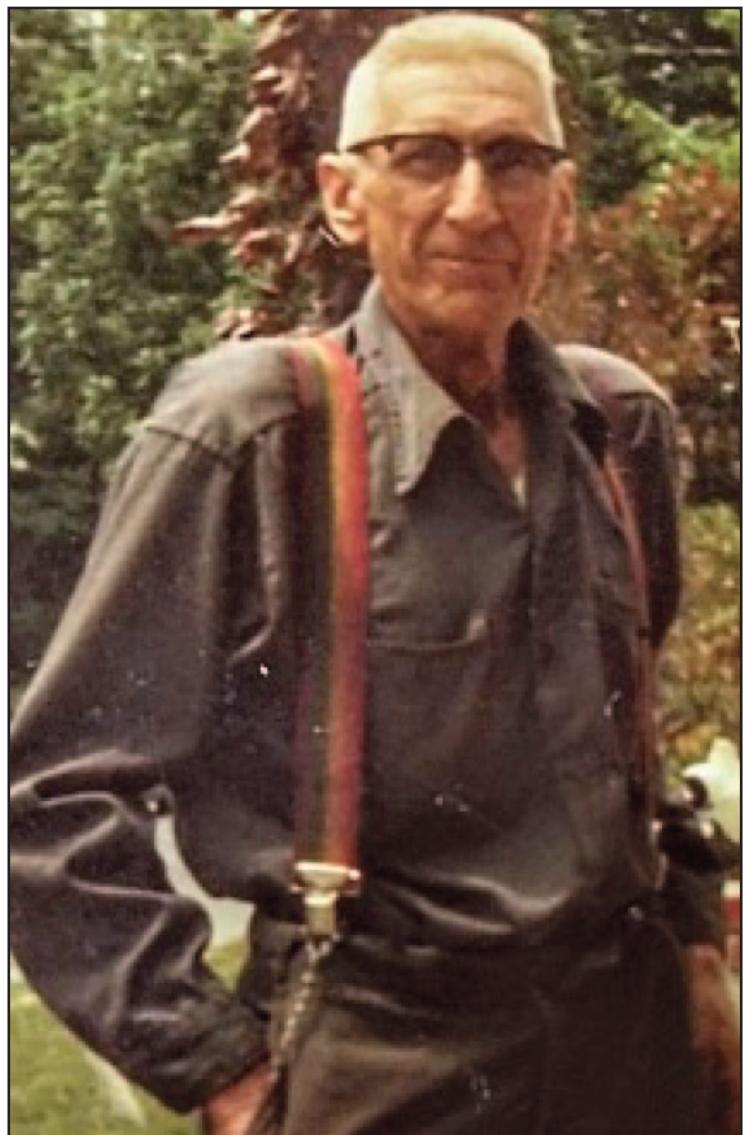
If you have ever taken a stroll through the Old Mill Park in Lake Luzerne, you've most likely walked across the little steel bridge that crosses Wells Creek. You might have taken pictures of family gatherings, wedding parties, baptisms, birthdays, or hikes as many people have over the last six decades. Like countless others who grew up here in Lake Luzerne, I played on it and as a young student at H.L.C.S., had class photos taken at the park as well. This park was a destination for school field trips to collect beautiful leaves in the fall for class projects, along with science and social studies classes throughout the year.

As a young adult, I strolled with my wife Judy as the romantic atmosphere of the bridge and the waterfalls were free of life's distractions. Both Judy and I have grown up with memories of the park and this special bridge. Our children have always played in the park and grown to the point that their children have also. This 5-generation connection with the bridge goes back to before my time. My grandfather, Orie Tubbs and his cousin Harold Clute, Sr., had built the bridge in May of 1963. I was born 2 months earlier that year. The steel bridge replaced what my dad Ray Askins, called the rickety old wooden bridge. The replacement was long overdue. Today's bridge spans 30 feet across the rapids that are the outlet of Lake Luzerne, and will hopefully be around for another 5 generations! My mom, Betty Tubbs Askins Schwaebel, tells me my grandfather, a skilled welder, had retired from the IP Mill in Corinth and was a part-time employee of the Lake Luzerne Town Highway Department. He also was the owner and operator of Tubbs Welding Shop that was directly across from the Old Mill Park. Harold Clute, Sr. was the Highway Supervisor at the time of the bridge project which included the railings along the creek. Together, Grandpa Orie and Harold Clute, Sr., solidly built what was to become a genuine landmark here in the Town of Lake Luzerne.

How I wish I could step back in time and spend a day with Grandpa and Harold to see just how they built that bridge. They were both perfectionists and artists at the same time, crafting this special place which has given us so many countless memories.



**Inscription on bridge in Old Mill Park. The inscription reads: "May 28, '63. Ot. HC."**



**Orie Tubbs**



**Former wooden bridge over Wells Creek.**